

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF OATLEY PUBLIC SCHOOL

The oncoming summer season will compel children of tender age living in this distant quarter (about two miles from Mortdale) to tramp, under a broiling sun, to Mortdale Public School . . .

- A.H. Rinoldi, Oatley  
resident, 1.9.1913.

Our children will have to tramp as far as two miles through lonely places (to get to school).

- A.E. Cuthbertson,  
Secretary of Oatley  
Progress Association,  
1914.

If we were to judge the state of development of Oatley by the two quotations above, we would possibly be led to believe that, just prior to the Great War, Oatley was a frontier settlement - isolated, vulnerable to the elements, and undeveloped. But this was not the case. Many of its streets had been laid out, a railway station served the community's transport needs, there was a church with a thriving Sunday School in operation, a post office, a School of Arts, and numerous houses. However, the two quotations above came from men who were arguing a case for a school at Oatley. They were endeavouring to show that Oatley was both separate and at a distance from Mortdale. It would be useful to counteract their views on Oatley with the Education Department's inspector's opinion of the place:

Oatley is a beautiful residential suburb;  
the locality is permanently settled; and  
the population is steadily increasing. \*

Oatley was at this time facing the problem which most fringe suburbs have to face as settlement extends out from the city. Oatley had its own identity, and was considered to be separated from Mortdale by Hurstville Road, and yet in some ways Oatley was not yet an independent entity, for it was linked to Mortdale by its school. Naturally when new suburbs are developing, resources are used in common. The difficulty occurs as to when to establish separate resources. This was Oatley's problem. Was it yet time to break with Mortdale school and start a new school at Oatley, or was Oatley still not ready?

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\* The attached map shows Oatley in 1912 as drawn by A.E. Cuthbertson, Secretary of Oatley Progress Association.

Clearly, from the two opening quotations, the residents of Oatley believed that a new school was essential. The residents not only pointed to the growth of Oatley, but to the new developments on the Como Lakes Estate where some 40 homes were going up. The inspector of schools also believed that a new school was necessary due to the slight overcrowding at Mortdale Public School. His comment on the situation was this:

On enquiry I find that enrolment will be about 90; the attendance will grow with the steadily increasing settlement. The parents are willing to accept, as an instalment, an Infants' School which at present would serve about 45 children between 4 and 7 years of age, and to allow their elder children to continue their attendance at Mortdale pending further local development. As, however, the accommodation at Mortdale Pub. is already overtaxed, the removal therefrom of all the Oatley children is desirable.

Had not the war intervened, a school for Oatley would have been approved as a result of the inspector's comments above.

By 1917 the accommodation problem at Mortdale Public School had become acute. Over 150 pupils were being taught in a rented hall on the opposite side of the railway line to the main school. Once again, the Oatley residents asked for their own school and once again the inspector of schools agreed that it was required. He pointed out to the Director of Education that Oatley had to have a school "sooner or later, and this was an opportune time" to establish it. Further, to save costs (it was still war time) he recommended the use of a rented building until finance was available. The building he had in mind was the School of Arts hall \* which he considered capable of accommodating 100 children and 2 teachers comfortably. The inspector also suggested restricting enrolments to 3rd class pupils and below, so that the total attendance would not exceed 100 to 125.

The inspector's recommendations were approved: the School of Arts hall was engaged, furnished and Mr. Walter Horne appointed as the school's first headmaster. Lessons began on 2nd October 1917 and by December 1917 there were 69 pupils enrolled. Consequently children up to 4th class were admitted in 1918, and 5th class from January 1920.

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\* The School of Arts hall was approximately 45 feet by 30 feet, with 8 windows. Acoustically it was very unsatisfactory for class-work due to its inability to muffle noise; if anything it amplified it.

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While the residents of Oatley were pleased with the establishment of the school, they were not satisfied with its accommodation especially after the war was over. In December 1919 a very large petition \* was forwarded to the Minister for Education requesting a permanent building for the school. As a result plans were drawn up for a new building and tenders called. The residents responded:

The Oatley Parents and Citizens' Association and the community in general are overjoyed to hear that tenders are to be called for the new school in that district, and we thank you. We trust that it will be a full-sized school up to 6th class.

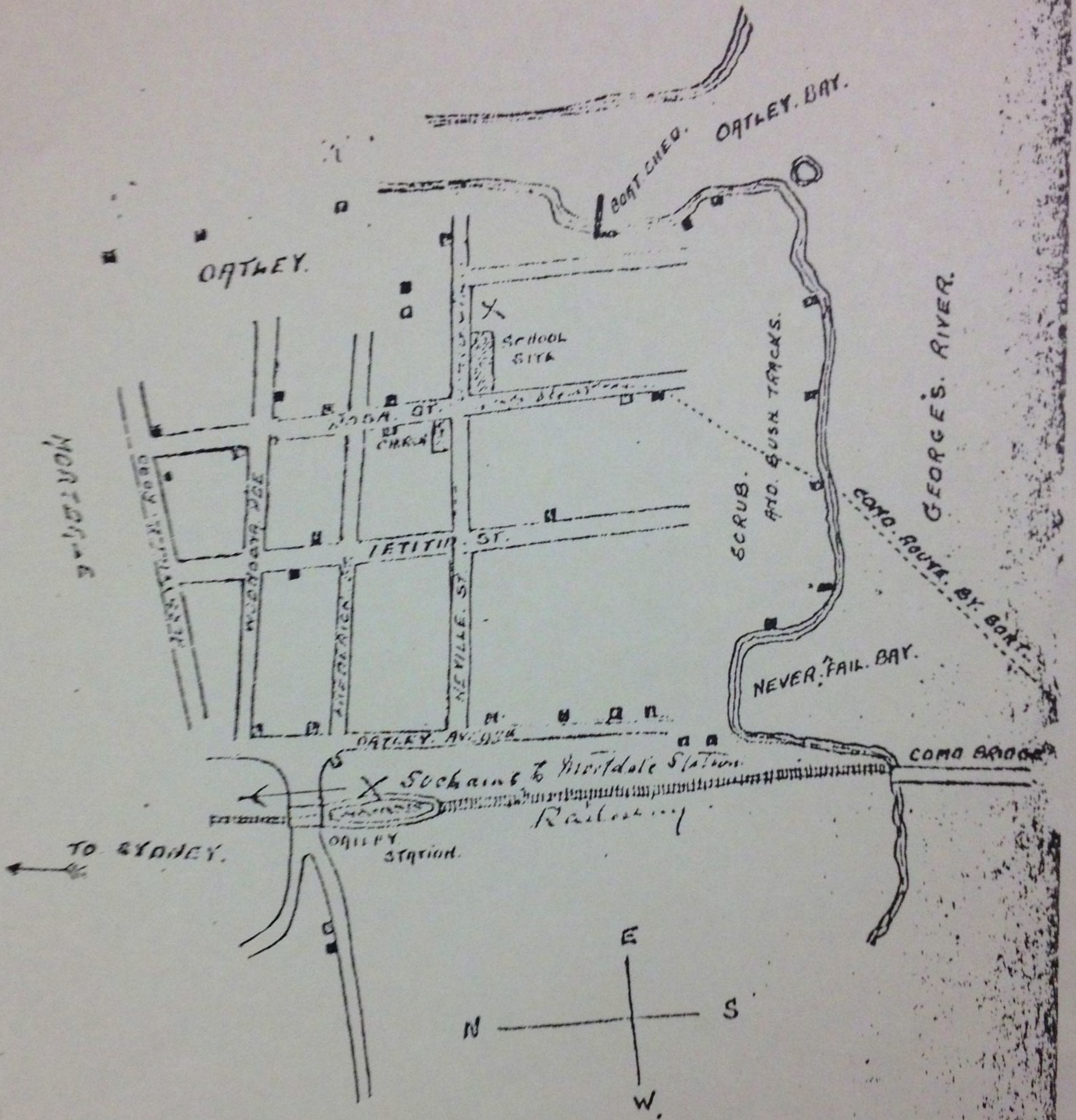
The tender of Mr. P. Paron was accepted for £2,659 and the work was finished in June 1921. The building consisted of three classrooms capable of housing 150 pupils. Unfortunately the enrolment in June 1921 was 188 and the average attendance 132. Oatley had its new building but already it had outgrown it.

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\* This petition gives the name and address of several hundred residents of Oatley and would be an invaluable resource document for those interested in Oatley at this period. It can be found in the N.S.W. State Archives, Education Records, P. Box 2758. The earlier applications for the school also contain similar and additional information and can be found in the same box.

OFFICES - OATLEY

# Oatley Local plan



LOCAL SKETCH  
 SHOWING RESIDENCES  
 OF PUPILS  
 1912

The attached map shows Oatley in 1912 as drawn by A.E. Cuthbertson, Secretary of Oatley Progress Association.

OATLEY